

## Aspiration Prayers for Liberation Through Hearing at the Time of Death

This teaching is called the Bardo Thödol in Tibetan, or Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State After Death. It was given by Padmasambhava to Karma Lingpa and then to many students, including us. It is a teaching to develop great compassion for all beings who experience impermanence and death. The teaching is in the form of powerful aspiration prayers which guide the student through the intermediate state after death to liberation in a pure land. Successful completion of the journey relies upon the student-teacher bond of samaya, which is the student's pure faith and devotion to the teacher. It is very important to listen to, understand, and contemplate the prayers again and again before death. Then at death, the prayers are repeated to the dead student, who hears and recognizes them and safely passes through the intermediate state to liberation.

While listening to the prayers, you will see images of buddhas and bodhisattvas that will be present while passing through the intermediate state after death. Several texts and commentaries for these prayers are available and the English version recited is from a book entitled "The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo", translated by Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa, 1987. May all beings benefit from the boundless merit of this teaching.

By this merit may all attain omniscience. May it defeat the enemy, wrongdoing. May we free all beings from the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death in the oceans of samsara. May we swiftly accomplish the Great Perfection and then establish each and every sentient being in that very state.

Movies, Part 1 and Part 2 of reading the four aspiration prayers in English with images seen in the bardo after death are [here](#) and [here](#).

### **From the Karling Shitro: Bardo Thödol; Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo**

*Aspiration Prayer Calling on the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Rescue*

At the time of one's death, one should always call on the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for rescue. One should make material and mental offerings to the Three Jewels, and holding fragrant incense in one's hand, say these words with intense power of concentration. §

O Buddhas and Bodhisattvas dwelling in the ten directions, compassionate, all-knowing, with the five kinds of eyes, loving, protectors of all sentient beings, come to this place by the power of compassion and accept these material and mental offerings. §

O compassionate ones, you possess understanding wisdom, loving compassion, effective action, and protecting power beyond the reach of thought. O compassionate ones, this person (name) is going from this world to the other shore. He is leaving this world. He is dying without choice. He has no friends. He is suffering greatly. He has no refuge. He has no protector. He has no allies. The light of this life has set. He is going to another world. He is entering dense darkness. He is falling down a deep precipice. He is entering a thick forest. He is pursued by the power of karma. He is entering a great wilderness. He is swept away by a great ocean. He is driven on by the wind of karma. He is going where there is no solid ground. He is embarking on a great battle. He is seized by the great evil spirit. He is terrified by the messengers of the Lord of Death. He is entering existence after existence because of his karma. He is helpless. The time has come when he must go on alone without a friend. §

O compassionate ones, be a refuge to him (name) who has no refuge. Protect him. Defend him. Keep him from the great darkness of the bardo. Turn him aside from the great hurricane of karma. Protect him from the great fear of the Lord of Death. Deliver him from the long and dangerous pathway of the bardo.

O compassionate ones, do not let your compassion be small. Rescue him. Do not let him go to the three lower realms. Do not forget your former vows. but quickly send out the power of your compassion. §

O Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, do not let your compassion and skillful means for him (name) be small. Seize him with compassion. Do not let a single sentient being fall into the power of evil karma. §

May the Three Jewels be a refuge from suffering in the bardo. §

This should be said three times with deep devotion by oneself and all others. Then ‘Liberation through Hearing’, ‘Deliverance from the Dangerous Pathway of the Bardo’, and ‘The Bardo Prayer which Protects from Fear’ should be read. §

#### *Liberation through Hearing*

Now when the bardo of birth is dawning upon me, I will abandon laziness for which life has no time, enter the undistracted path of study, reflection, and meditation, making reflections and the mind the path, and realize the three kayas. Now that I have once attained a human body, there is no time on the path for the mind to wander. §

Now when the bardo of dreams is dawning upon me, I will abandon the corpse-like sleep of careless ignorance, and let my thoughts enter their natural state without distraction. Controlling and transforming dreams in luminosity, I will not sleep like an animal, but unify completely sleep and practice. §

Now when the bardo of samadhi-meditation dawns upon me, I will abandon the crowd of distractions and confusions, and rest in the boundless state without grasping or disturbance. Firm in the two practices; visualization and completion, at this time of meditation, one-pointed, free from activity, I will not fall into the power of confused emotions. §

Now when the bardo of the moment of death dawns upon me, I will abandon all grasping, yearning, and attachment, enter undistracted into clear awareness of the teaching, and eject my consciousness into the space of unborn mind. As I leave this compound body of flesh and blood, I will know it to be a transitory illusion. §

Now when the bardo of dharmata dawns upon me, I will abandon all thoughts of fear and terror. I will recognize whatever appears as my projection and know it to be a vision of the bardo. Now that I have reached this crucial point, I will not fear the peaceful and wrathful ones, my own projections. §

Now when the bardo of becoming dawns upon me, I will concentrate my mind one-pointedly, and strive to prolong the results of good karma, close the womb-entrance, and think of resistance. This is the time when perseverance and pure thought are needed. Abandon jealousy, and meditate on the guru with his consort. §

With mind far off, not thinking of death’s coming, performing these meaningless activities, returning empty-handed now would be complete confusion. The need is for recognition, holy dharma. So why not practice dharma at this very moment? From the mouths of siddhas come these words: If you do not keep your guru’s teaching in your heart will you not become your own deceiver? §

#### *Deliverance from the Dangerous Pathway of the Bardo*

Homage to the gurus, yidams, and dakinis. With their great love, may they lead us on the path. §

When through confusion I wander in samsara, on the undistracted light-path of study, reflection, and meditation, may the gurus of the sacred lineage go before me, their consorts, the host of dakinis behind me. Help me to cross the bardo’s dangerous pathway and bring me to the perfect buddha state. §

When through intense ignorance I wander in samsara, on the luminous light-path of the dharmadhatu wisdom, may blessed Vairocana go before me, his consort the Queen of Vajra Space behind me. Help me to cross the bardo’s dangerous pathway and bring me to the perfect buddha state. §

When through intense aggression I wander in samsara, on the luminous light-path of the mirror-like wisdom, may blessed Vajrasattva go before me, his consort Buddha-Locana behind me. Help me to cross the bardo’s dangerous pathway and bring me to the perfect buddha state. §

When through intense pride I wander in samsara, on the luminous light-path of the wisdom of equality, may blessed Ratnasambhava go before me, his consort Mamaki behind me. Help me to cross the bardo's dangerous pathway and bring me to the perfect buddha state. ॐ

When through intense desire I wander in samsara, on the luminous light-path of discriminating wisdom, may blessed Amitabha go before me, his consort Pandaravasini behind me. Help me to cross the bardo's dangerous pathway and bring me to the perfect buddha state. ॐ

When through intense envy I wander in samsara, on the luminous light-path of action-accomplishing wisdom, may blessed Amoghasiddhi go before me, his consort Samaya-Tara behind me. Help me to cross the bardo's dangerous pathway and bring me to the perfect buddha state. ॐ

When through strong unconscious tendencies I wander in samsara, on the luminous light-path of innate wisdom, may the vidyadhara warriors go before me, their consorts the host of dakinis behind me. Help me to cross the bardo's dangerous pathway and bring me to the perfect buddha state. ॐ

When through fierce confused projections I wander in samsara, on the luminous light-path of abandoning all fear, may the blessed ones, peaceful and wrathful, go before me, the host of dakinis, Queens of Space, behind me. Help me to cross the bardo's dangerous pathway and bring me to the perfect buddha state. ॐ

May the element of space not rise up as an enemy. May I see the realm of the blue buddha. May the element of water not rise up as an enemy. May I see the realm of the white buddha. May the element of earth not rise up as an enemy. May I see the realm of the yellow buddha. May the element of fire not rise up as an enemy. May I see the realm of the red buddha. May the element of air not rise up as an enemy. May I see the realm of the green buddha. May the rainbow of the elements not rise up as enemies. May I see the realms of all the buddhas. May the sounds, lights, and rays not rise up as enemies. May I see the infinite realms of the peaceful and wrathful ones. May I know all the sounds as my own sound. May I know all the lights as my own light. May I know all the rays as my own ray. May I spontaneously know the bardo as myself. May I attain the realms of the three kayas. ॐ

#### *The Bardo Prayer which Protects from Fear*

When the journey of my life has reached its end, and since no relatives go with me from this world, I wander in the bardo state alone. May the peaceful and wrathful buddhas send out the power of their compassion and clear away the dense darkness of ignorance. ॐ

When parted from beloved friends, wandering alone, my own projections' empty forms appear. May the buddhas send out the power of their compassion so that the bardo's terrors do not come. ॐ

When the five luminous lights of wisdom shine, fearlessly may I recognize myself. When the forms of the peaceful and wrathful ones appear, fearless and confident may I recognize the bardo. ॐ

When I suffer through the power of evil karma, may the peaceful and wrathful buddhas clear away suffering. When the sound of dharmata roars like a thousand thunders, may it be transformed into the sound of the mahayana teaching. ॐ

When I follow my karma without a refuge, may the peaceful and wrathful buddhas be my refuge. When I suffer the karma of unconscious tendencies, may the samadhi of bliss and luminosity arise. ॐ

At the moment of spontaneous birth in the bardo of becoming, may the false teachings of the tempter not arise. When I arise wherever I wish by supernatural power, may the illusory terrors of evil karma not arise. ॐ

When savage beasts of prey are roaring, may it become the sound of dharma, the six syllables. When I am chased by snow, rain, wind, and darkness, may I receive the clear, divine eye of wisdom. ॐ

May all sentient beings of the same realm in the bardo, free from jealousy, be born in a higher state.

When great thirst and hunger are caused by passions, may the pain of thirst and hunger, heat and cold, not arise. ॐ

When I see my future parents in union, may I see the peaceful and wrathful buddhas with their consorts. With power to choose my birthplace, for the good of others, may I receive a perfect body adorned with auspicious signs. ॐ

Obtaining for myself a perfect human body, may all who see and hear me at once be liberated. May I not follow all my evil karma, but follow and increase what merit I may have. §

Wherever I am born, at that very place, may I meet the yidam of this life face to face. Knowing how to walk and talk as soon as I am born, may I attain the power of non-forgetfulness and remembrance of past lives. §

In all the stages of learning, high, middle, and low, may I understand just by hearing, thinking, and seeing. Wherever I am born, may that land be blessed, so that all sentient beings may be happy. §

O peaceful and wrathful buddhas, may I and others become like you yourselves, just as you are, with your forms, auspicious marks, retinues, long life, and realms. §

Samantabhadra, the peaceful and wrathful ones, infinite compassion, the power of truth of the pure dharmata, and followers of tantra in the one-pointed meditation: may their blessings fulfill this aspiration prayer. §

*May all beings benefit. This text was adapted from the translation by F. Fremantle and C. Trungpa contained in "The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo", 1987.*